

FOREST SERVICE ALERT & WARNING

Forest Service Closes Trails in Yancey County Because of Bear Activity

The USDA Forest Service National Forests in North Carolina today announced the closure of four trails on the Appalachian Ranger District because of a number of recent human encounters with bears. This closure is in effect until further notice.

About a half-dozen bear encounters have been reported in less than a week in the area of Commissary Ridge near Mount Mitchell in Yancey County. Since public safety is the top priority at the Forest Service, the agency has decided to close four trails and related areas to camping.

The following areas are temporarily closed:

- Buncombe Horse Trail- from Forest Service Road 472 to the intersection the Big Tom Gap trail (TR 1918)
- Mt. Mitchell Trail - from Black Mountain Camp Ground to Mount Mitchell State Park
- Mountain to Sea Trail- From State Hwy. 128 to Black Mountain Camp Ground
- Higgins Bald Trail (TR 1908)

The closure is intended to provide for public safety by reducing human/bear interaction. Visitors to the national forests are encouraged to practice the following safety measures to reduce bear encounters:

- Make noise to avoid surprising a bear.
- Never approach a bear or other wild animal.
- Do not hike in the dark.
- Carry EPA registered bear pepper spray
- Keep a clean camp site by properly disposing of food scraps and garbage. Do not leave food or garbage inside fire rings, grills or around your site.
- Never leave food or coolers unattended, even in developed picnic areas.
- If bear-proof containers are not available, store food and garbage inside a hard-top vehicle or trailer.
- Never store food inside of a tent.
- Wipe tabletops clean before vacating a camp or picnic site.
- If a bear is observed nearby, pack up your food and trash immediately and vacate the area as soon as possible.

For more tips on bear safety, visit: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/outdoorsafety/wildlife.php>

The Forest Service closures coincide with the closure of Mount Mitchell Trail and Commissary Ridge trail in Mount Mitchell State Park because of the increased bear activity.

For more information on the Forest Service closures, contact the Appalachian Ranger District office at 828-682-6146.

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